

التمييز الجندي وبُنى السلطة الاستعمارية في رواية كتاب نساء الليل

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Gender Discrimination and Colonial Power Structures in Marlon James's The Book of Night Women

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المستخلص

تقارب رواية كتاب نساء الليل من خلال رؤية مارلون جيمس بوصفها سردية تُظهر أن اللامساواة الجندرية ليست مجرد نتيجة أو أثر جانبي للعبودية الاستعمارية، بل هي واحدة من أكثر إرثها عمقًا واستمرارًا، ومن ثم فهي متجذرة بعمق في بنية السرد. كما أن الرواية لا تصوّر العنف ضد النساء المستعبدات بوصفه ظاهرة عرضية أو مجرد انعكاس لهيمنة عرقية أوسع، بل تسعى إلى إظهار علاقة أكثر تعقيدًا بكيفية عمل الهيمنة الاستعمارية في جامايكا في القرن الثامن عشر؛ إذ لا تعمل هذه الهيمنة بصورة أحادية، بل ضمن اقتصاد جندي يجعل من أجساد النساء مواقع لإعادة الإنتاج والعقاب والإخضاع الرمزي. تؤدي المزرعة دورًا لا بوصفها فضاءً مشكلاً عرقياً فحسب، بل أيضاً بوصفها فضاءً لإنتاج الجندر وإعادة تفكيكه. وداخل هذا الفضاء تصبح مقاومة السلطة عملية متشظية ومجزأة، تعكس إعادة ضبط علاقات القوة حتى بين المستعبدين أنفسهم. ومن خلال توظيف منظور نسوي ما بعد استعماري يستند إلى النظرية النسوية السوداء والتاريخ الاستعماري وتحليل السرد، يقترح هذا البحث مقارنة مختلفة لفهم جماعة نساء الليل .

فعوضاً عن النظر إليهن بوصفهن كتلة نسوية موحدة، يجادل البحث بضرورة فهمهن بوصفهن فضاءً متوترًا ومتعارضًا تم فيه استبطان منطق الاستعمار ذاته. ومن خلال تحليل شخصية ليليث، يسعى المقال إلى إظهار كيفية تداخل العنف الجنسي والأمومة القسرية والبنية الأبوية داخل مجتمع المستعبدين، بحيث تعمل هذه العوامل مجتمعة على ضبط النساء وتأديبهن، وفي الوقت ذاته تُشكّل أنماطاً من المقاومة لا تتسجم تمامًا مع نماذج المقاومة البطولية أو الخلاصية التقليدية. كما أن اختيارات جيمس اللغوية، بما في ذلك السرد المشبع بلهجة الكريول وكذلك توظيف الصمت، تتحدى الإبستمولوجيا الاستعمارية ونزعتهما إلى محو معرفة النساء المستعبدات. ومن خلال إبراز الجندر بوصفه منطقاً داخلياً للسلطة الاستعمارية لا مجرد نتيجة لاحقة لها، تقدم هذه الدراسة إسهاماً نقدياً مهماً في دراسات مارلون جيمس؛ إذ تؤكد أن رواية كتاب نساء الليل ينبغي أن تُقرأ بوصفها نصاً تتجلى فيه إدارة السلطة الاستعمارية لأجساد النساء وأصواتهن بوضوح شديد، حيث تُفتح ماضيهن ومستقبلهن على نحو قسري للفحص والسيطرة.

Abstract

The Book of Night Women is viewed through Marlon James' eyes as a narrative that depicts gender inequalities not merely as an effect or by-product of colonial slavery; instead, they are one of its most intimate and long-lasting legacies and therefore have deep roots within the narrative. Furthermore, the Book of Night Women does not visualize violence against enslaved women simply as an epiphenomenon or to be symptomatic of larger conditions of racial domination, but instead it seeks to show a more complex relationship between the ways in which colonial domination operates through eighteenth century Jamaica; not simply in monolithic terms, but as a gender economy that places women's bodies as sites for reproduction, punishment and symbolic subordination. The plantation functions not only as a racially constructed space, but also as a space of production/disarticulation of gender and within the plantation, resistance to power becomes both diffused/fragmented characterizes the process of re-calibrating power between enslaved peoples themselves. Using a postcolonial feminist lens that draws upon Black feminist theory, colonial history, and narrative analysis I'd like to suggest another way of thinking about the Night Women. Specifically, I will argue that instead of viewing Night Women as an unified feminist body, we need to examine them as conflicted space where colonial logic has been internalized by these women. Using the figure of Lilith, this



article strives to demonstrate the way in which sexual violence, forced maternity, and patriarchy among enslaved peoples operate interdependently in order to discipline women while also shaping types of resistant acts that do not quite fit into models of heroic or redemptive resistance. James's linguistic decisions, including Creole-tinged narrative and silence as well, challenge colonial epistemology and its habit of effacing enslaved women's knowledge. In foregrounding gender as, rather than a related aftermath of, the inner logic of colonial power, this study makes yet another important queer intervention in Marlon James scholarship: that *The Book of Night Women* demands to be read as a novel in which it is women's bodies and voices that are most palpably managed by colonial power regimes; their past and future pried open for inspection.

I.Introduction: Colonial Jamaica and the Gendering of Power

Colonial Jamaica during the late eighteenth century was not merely a context for racial domination but a site where power was constantly reconfigured through its management of bodies, labor, and reproduction, and within this framework, gender does not simply exist as a cultural addendum but as a principle of colonial domination itself. *The Book of Night Women* locates its narrative within this historical context and insists that the violence inflicted upon enslaved women not be perceived as collateral damage within the context of plantation slavery but as one of its most assured technologies. Marlon James's novel challenges the tendency within historical and literary discourse to perceive enslaved women's suffering as narratively secondary to rebellion or racial antagonism but foregrounds gender domination as a force which configures possibilities for resistance itself.

The plantation system, as depicted in the novel, appears to be governed by what can be called a gender logic of power that positions the enslaved woman in a position of being both hypervisible and disposable. This is a phenomenon that is consistent with the position of the subaltern woman that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak outlines in her famous essay on the subaltern. According to Spivak, the subaltern woman is oppressed by the interposition of colonialism and patriarchy, so that "the female subaltern



is even more deeply in shadow”¹. The shadow in James’s work is not one of silence; instead, the woman is made legible to colonialism only to the extent that she is useful to the colonial economy.

Instead, the novel reveals the internal stratification within slavery, such as how enslaved males are treated differently from women in the same system of oppression. The gender discrimination in *The Book of Night Women* can be seen as an intra-colonial device, which re-channels power downwards and sideways while maintaining white supremacy at the top. The women slaves do not only face the power of white colonizers but also experience forms of dominance by overseers, drivers, and even male slaves, which demonstrates what hooks refers to as a “system in which racism and sexism are interlocking systems of domination rather than mutually exclusive forms of oppression”². Such an interlocking system makes any attempt to view slave resistance along racial and nationalist lines problematic.

The protagonist of the novel, Lilith, is a complex creation. Her character suggests that colonialism corrupts the self as well as batters the body, instilling a sense of fury, terror and resistance that doesn’t always easily translate into unified revolutionary action. Unlike other slave narratives or novels of becoming that highlight progress towards freedom, James’s novel suggests a world in which revolution is a bit messy, unethical and possibly even complicit with the colonialism from which it tries to break free. The Night Women, the secret order of enslaved women who resist their masters, are not a straightforward feminist resistance so much as one founded on secrecy, compulsion and hierarchy.

Lilith, the protagonist in the novel, is hard for us to understand because of her complicated character. The main character represents how the brutality of colonialism affects both the body and the self in complex ways, and if we don't address these issues through collective revolutionary action we will always be a 'deeply angry' and 'fearful person who is either going to submit to oppression passively, or resist.’’ Unlike other slave narratives that facilitate progress toward liberty, James’s novel constructs a world of revolutionary struggle as difficult and illicit, as complicit with colonialism itself. The Night Women, the secret group of enslaved women who conspire against their masters, are not an



unproblematic feminist resistance but one that is the product of secrecy, coercion, and hierarchy.

In placing gender discrimination at the heart of colonialist politics, the novel also disputes liberal humanist approaches to slavery that emphasize universal suffering but ignore particularized experiences. In this context, Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality seems relevant to the discussion. In particular, her claim that oppression cannot be fully comprehended by treating race and gender as mutually exclusive categories, which renders Black women analytically invisible³, seems relevant to *The Book of Night Women*, which disputes any attempt to see enslaved women's suffering, anger, and complexity as aberrant or unconnected to the history of slavery.

This research therefore engages James's novel as a work of theory as much as it is a work of historical reconstruction, revealing the ways in which colonial power relies on the control of gendered bodies as a means of self-perpetuation. This research asks how the use of sexual violence, enforced maternity, and internalized patriarchy work in conjunction with the plantation system, as well as the ways in which the narrative of the novel refuses the kinds of sentimental or redemptive solutions that might be offered in other works of the era. This research engages the ways in which gender discrimination works as the internal logic rather than the result of colonial domination in an attempt to add a new perspective to the broader study of Caribbean literature as a whole, as a body of work that engages the ways in which colonial power is most evident in the ways in which women's lives are systematically undervalued in the text of James's *Book of Night Women*.

II. Theoretical Framework: Gender, Power, and Colonial Discipline

To read *The Book of Night Women* as a story of colonial domination without thinking about gender would be to repeat the same epistemic violence that the novel contests. For colonial domination, as this study argues, is not just about racial order or economic exploitation but about the creation of gender difference as a mode of discipline that fragments the enslaved population. This approach, therefore, is informed by postcolonial feminist theory, black feminist studies, and histories of

slavery in order to conceptualize gender discrimination as part of the mechanism of colonial domination.

Postcolonial feminism is an important corrective to universalizing theories of the oppression of women because of its emphasis on the specificity of colonial violence. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's intervention is the most important one in this respect. Spivak's work is particularly important because of her intervention on the notion of the "recovery" of subaltern voices that leaves the structures of silencing intact. Spivak's famous statement that "the subaltern cannot speak"⁴ is not a denial of the existence of the subaltern's voice; rather, it is a way of pointing out the conditions under which the subaltern's voice is made nonsensical. The subaltern women in *The Book of Night Women* speak constantly through gossip, conspiracy, song, and narrative; however, they speak within a colonial economy that transforms their voices into threat, pathology, and noise.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to extend this model, as proposed by Spivak, with Black feminist theory to consider the particularities of the intersection of both races and genders under slavery. The idea, as proposed by bell hooks, that Black women experience their oppression through "interlocking systems of domination"⁵ enables the reader to consider the plantation as a space wherein racism and sexism do not coexist, but intersect and reinforce one another. The enslaved women, as portrayed in James's narrative, experience forms of violence that are at the same time racial and sexual, and this particular intersection creates a form of control. Sexual assault, coercion, and dispossession of women as mothers are not exceptional forms of violence, as they are normalized and serve to secure white power, shifting the violence to the least powerful bodies.

Furthermore, Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality helps to further explain the rationale behind the inability of the enslaved women in the novel to be understood through single-axis approaches. According to Crenshaw, the tendency of these approaches to analyze race and gender as two distinct approaches results in the "erasure of black women from both feminist and antiracist discourse"⁶. This is similar to the tendency of colonial history to only document the enslaved women as laborers or reproductive bodies without their subjective experiences. *The Book of*



Night Women avoids such an erasure of the enslaved woman through its narrative of colonial oppression from the psychic and corporeal space of the enslaved woman.

Colonial discipline, in other words, must be understood as a biopolitics of punishment but also as a biopolitics of life itself. Although Foucault does not specifically address the topic of slavery in his work, his ideas about the nature of power as productive rather than repressive offer an interesting reading when viewed through the context of slavery as well as colonialism. Power, as Foucault explains it, “produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth”⁷. In James’s novel, colonial power produces the reality of women as sexually available, reproductively valuable, and morally suspect, but also as legally non-persons. This is the reason why the routine of violence against women seems so bureaucratic in the world of the plantation.

Yet, the framework must also address the limitations of the Foucauldian perspective when dealing with colonial societies. As María Lugones argues, colonialism created a “coloniality of gender,” which reshapes social relations by imposing European patriarchal relations on the colonized peoples⁸. This perspective is particularly relevant to *The Book of Night Women*, as the gender relations of the enslaved are seen to be neither natural nor pre-colonial, but were reshaped by the violent transformation of African social relations under slavery. The partial access of enslaved men to power becomes one of the avenues through which colonial power is extended, allowing it to be internal as well as external.

On the basis of this theory, the novel can be approached as a critique about those strands of resistance narratives that do not consider asymmetries between genders. The resistance I’ve mentioned in *The Night Women* isn’t some romantic, idealistic form of rebellion – it exists at a place of compulsion, secrecy and violence. James’s novel uncovers the notion of gender solidarity as an uneven development of oppression and shows us how power within the colony gives its form to places in the colony. This elevation of *The Book of Night Women* contradicts the romanticized notion of resistance that sinks its claws into you and offers a fuller sense of how fucking complex it is to think about the terrain of the colony.



This postcolonial and Black feminist theoretical re-conception, the gendered power relations of the colony as context for *The Book of Night Women* suggests, provides a theoretical grounding to read *The Book of Night Women* as a novel in which patriarchal discrimination is one locus of operation within the power relations of the colony. This framework thus provides not only a basis of interpretation of *The Book of Night Women*, but also challenges and rewrites the concepts and presuppositions of the novel as well as its interpretation by engaging literary theory and postcolonial debates on who has power over whom in terms of gender towards the colony.

III. The Plantation as a Gendered Colonial Institution

The plantation, as it is presented in *The Book of Night Women*, is not just a site of violence, but it is constructed as a colonial structure designed to manage the slaves in a particular way. James constructs the plantation as a structure that treats the enslaved women differently from their men. And the enslaved women, along with their labor, have a role to play as reproductives and sexual partners, which ties them further to the colonial structure. Gender subordination is so embedded within the structure of the plantation that it is actually a part of its very fabric.

The structure of the plantation is actually designed in a way such that the physical bodies of these enslaved women are flaunted. The brutal labor of the enslaved men, of course, is also highly erotic, and this is depicted in a highly graphic manner, but it is not as intruded upon (and eroticized) as is the case with the women. This is quite explicitly stated by James when he describes the scene from the book when he describes the childhood of the character Lilith. It is a kind of elementary education in violence. It is not just violence, but it is constructed as a part of the very structure of the plantation. The gaze of the overseer, the entitlement of the master, and the violence combine to form a kind of regime of gendered surveillance, where the enslaved women are actually punished for being alive.

This is similar to the way in which the historical examinations of slavery in the Caribbean have emphasized the way in which enslaved women were conceived of as workers and breeders and the fertility of these women as a colonial asset. As Hilary Beckles describes it, enslaved women in the Caribbean experienced a “double exploitation of labor and





sexuality,” which explains, in part, why they were so vulnerable and yet also how useful they were to enslavers⁹. James’ work is significant because it is not only similar to these examinations of the way in which enslaved women were useful to enslavers, but it also makes the psychological effects of being reduced to a state in which one is no longer anything more than fertile flesh visible, as it does in the way in which it illustrates the effects of being reduced to that state upon the trust and intimacy that can exist between enslaved women.

In this way, the sexual violence that is experienced by the enslaved women in James’ work is not an aberration, nor is it an anomaly; it is, rather, a part of the rhythm and routine of life in the plantation. The rape of Lilith’s mother, which is discussed in great detail, illustrates the way in which colonialism makes the bodies of enslaved women available to colonizers and makes these acts of rape morally benign. There is no euphemism here; rather, it is a dedication to making the banality of these acts of rape visible, much in the way that Saidiya Hartman describes “the everyday terror” of slavery, in which pain becomes so mundane that it is difficult to make it visible without fetishizing it¹⁰.

Importantly, this gendered system also creates a hierarchy of the enslaved. Male slaves, in particular driver and overseer positions of African heritage have some power that can distinguish them from the more feminized roles of subjugation. This power, limited as it may be, allows colonial domination to flow internally and create, what Fanon might refer to a “colonial world” in which individuals are divided not only by race but by zones of privilege and subjugation¹¹. At the bottom of this hierarchy are Black women who are enslaved and oppressed from above and below, by whites and blacks.

James develops additional layers to the impact that gender has on the plantation household by interpreting these homes as tools in the colonization of a country. The bedrooms, kitchens, and nurseries were not places of solace (i.e., places to catch your breath), but rather they were frontline locations where women's sexualities met their productive labours. The plantation house, then, functions as a miniaturized colonial world in which power is male and is hidden within the guise of intimacy. Angela Davis, in her work on slavery, argues that the home was not a safe

place for women; it was a location where their forms of labour caused them to be susceptible to a greater possibility of violence. This relationship between public and private violence (as described by Davis on page 7 of her thesis) cannot be separated from the way that James constructs his narrative about life in the plantation.

The framework through which *The Book of Night Women* presents the plantation as being a gender experience, as opposed to merely being an economic structure or system, serves to clarify how the institution of colonization remains in place via both the direct and narrative-supported degradation of enslaved women. The novel's approach to revolution is intended to illuminate the gender oppression aspect of slavery and where the Night Women fit into the overall story of slavery and revolutionary history.

IV. Sexual Violence and the Colonial Economy of the Female Body

Sexual violence in *The Book of Night Women* is not imagined as one of the colonial cruel excesses but is commoditized and regulated. The novel insists that the record of rape during slavery cannot be articulated in terms of violation or moral failure because it is sanctioned by a system that relegates enslaved women to property before it recognizes them as subjects. The tale of slavery that James's novel tells recasts the presentation of sexual violence as an aspect of governing in colonialism that can no longer be easily quarantined away from labor extraction, racial hierarchy and reproductive command.

The bodies of enslaved women are legally and symbolically at the disposal of white men, from which the concept of consent becomes moot in this novel. Lilith's mother is raped by her owner, not as a matter of lust but rather, as an expression of his total power. The way James describes this occurrence is not sensationalized, which indicates that such happenings are normal. This particular representation of violent sex attests to, as Saidiya Hartman argues, how "sexual terror was a calculated instrument of degradation and subjugation that became an everyday affair"¹².



The representation of sexual violence in *The Book of Night Women* does not characterize it as a surplus to colonial barbarity but as one of its most controlled and economically rational practices. This seems to be further substantiated in the novel, as it emphasizes the fact that 'rape under slavery can not be rendered back into a scene of transgression and moral "failure", for this is after all sanctioned by a system where the slave woman is seen primarily as chattel before she is seen as subject'. The setting of slavery as imagined in James' novel reconfigures the narrative on sexual violence as one among other aspects of colonial rule that cannot be disentangled from systems of labor extraction, racial ranking and reproductive power.

The novel has been clear from the start that the black bodies of those women are open to be used by white men, and therefore consent doesn't enter into it at all. It is manifested in the novel that Lilith's mother has been raped by her slave owner: this rape is not enacted out of desire, but out of absolute power. James's depiction of violence here does not seem sensationalized, which only serves to emphasize its mundanity. This kind of rendering of violence has also resonated with Saidiya Hartman's observation that "the sexual terror inflicted on the slave became a rationalized instrument and normalized as background to everyday life"¹³. Indeed, power relationships among slaves are here also being reconstructed. If male slaves are being emasculated under the colony and denied sexual self-control, they can nonetheless claim control over the female slave in their possession, reinforcing patriarchal relations among slaves. James does not idealize these relations, but presents them as evidence of how colonial power infiltrates the relationships among slaves. bell hooks' statement, that patriarchy can "operate without the presence of racial exploitation yet remain intrinsically woven within it"¹⁴, could be applied in this context to say that they show how harm based on gender may even be possible at a point when those who experience a racial subjugation are both actors.

It is also meaningful the novel refuses to romanticize sexual violence as part of a redemptive story. Some narratives treat rape as a heroic stimulus to rebellion or moral vision; *The Book of Night Women* foregrounds what happens after the rape. Sexual violation is not a path to clearness, oneness or moral epiphany, as we know from so many



narratives. It is, rather, the path to secrecy, suspicion and moral ambiguity. The premise for the Night Women's conspiracy comes from a world of assaulted bodies and limited freedom.

Focusing on sexual violence as a colonial technology, not an act of brutality, James takes on the liberal stories of separating out the structure and eliminating the bad¹⁵. Accordingly, while the female body is not just a site of subjugation of colonial domination, but a main instrument housing the site wherein we reproduce the negotiation and the memory of colonized oppression. This is crucial to understanding why, for James, sexism cannot be subsumed as a secondary question of race or class.

V. Enslaved Women and Intra-Colonial Patriarchies

One of the most distressing elements of *The Book of Night Women* is its refusal to raise the enslaved community as a single moral entity. Instead, in Marlon James's work, what materializes is how colonial power reconfigures social relationships within the oppressed community and creates a hierarchy of oppressions for women who experience it at the intersection. Therefore therein is not white-oppresses-only gender-bias in this novel, but the latter reproduced even within the oppressed, which makes to see how and where patriarchy becomes technology of colonialism that fabricates plantation system from within.

The enslaved males in the novel hold a complicated place, at once subjugated by racial terror but also given a kind of authority that removes them from the more feminized sides of slavery. On the one hand, drivers, crafts men or favored slaves are given close proximity to power that is fragile and exercised at the expense of others, especially women. This mediation is an example of what Frantz Fanon calls the colonialist strategy of creating intermediaries who, having ingested the Western power relation (colonialism) redirect it sideways and not upward (Fanon 59). That is, in the world of *The Book of Night Women* these figures do more than imitate white oppression: they annex masculinity to claim a brand of masculine power in a world where their own is so tightly constrained.

The results of a process like that are perfectly exemplified in the regulation of women's sexuality and behavior in the slave society. The



slave women are dominated not just by their owners and overseers, but even by the slaves themselves who have bought into the colonial constructs of decency, subservience and possession. With such a process, James is not naively idealistic but proves to us patriarchal subordination within the enslaved black community is not based on natural cruelty but rather created survival strategies under intense duress. The idea mentioned by hooks that “patriarchy is not eradicated under racial oppression but typically grows more entrenched” (hooks 84) Really applies here and one can see how the very meaning of masculinity was twisted into domination, as other forms of power had been robbed from the slave men by colonialism.

The tension becomes apparent in how Lilith and men interact. She meets with fear, suspicion, and betrayal rather than trust in her relationships with men, which serves to support the notion that the violence imposed by empire ultimately disallows true trust. As a result of the dislocative nature of the empire's violence, relationships become more about financial transaction and about how much the other party can be taken advantage of, thus becoming less redemptive, as they are in other places within this novel. The violence that Lilith suffers occurs as a result of white colonial subjugation, as well as through more direct forms of violence (the men she has interacted with) who have attempted to exercise power over her. As such, it is very clear that there is a tiered system of oppression in play, which supports Crenshaw's argument that black women are subordinated not only as women, but through the experiences of elangary in the two areas¹⁶.

The significance of the novel by James is that it does not portray enslaved black women as simply victims of patriarchal oppression, rather, the women within the narrative possess an awareness of these internalized patriarchal systems of power and actively resist against them through various methods – from cooperation to deception. However, gender solidarity is not generated through these actions; rather, what is created is a disjointed form of solidarity which reflects a colonial approach of "divide and conquer". María Lugones (2010) provides us with some insight into this situation through her notion of the "coloniality of gender", particularly when she states that colonialism imposed oppressive gender boundaries which regulated social relations, thereby normalizing



male dominance in everyday life as a requirement for civilization¹⁷. In James' novel, these colonial mandates also realign the social relationship between enslaved men and women, thereby allowing for sexual violence against women to exist without the presence of white people.

The *Night Women* themselves, naturally enough, are also to some extent a response to precisely this sort of intra-colonial patriarchy. For instance, their secrecy and seclusion can be understood as not only the result of a fear of white retaliation but also the fact they could never articulate their interest as women in a male dominated field of resistance. Yet at the same time the novel hardly romanticizes this feminine collectivity. There's power that circulates, also the brutal imprinting of discipline and control that provokes silence, this form of dissent is repressed enough to be able to tell us that those systems of domination from which these women resist have certainly left their scars. And this is precisely the point of this analysis: that the most powerful force with which colonial power reproduces itself are the social relations of oppression.

The Book of Night Women troubles the politics of solidarity under the impetus to consider the politics of intra-colonial patriarchy. Gender discrimination politics is also one of the fault lines in the politics of resistance and solidarity, and it shows how coloniality gets reproduced not just as violence but as a process of undergoing intimacy and desire. To understand the broken, and breaking-apart character of the revolt, so concession-stricken and collaborationist is it, one must think of politics beyond gender oppression in which women are enslaved.

VI. The Night Women: Resistance or Reproduction of Violence?

This is how *The Book of Night Women* dismantles traditional ideas about slave revolts: by demonstrating the complexity of rebellion, particularly when women rebel under circumstances where they are already subjugated on racial and colonialist terms. The *Night Women* of James's novel operate within a rule-bound system, plotting revolution not as a means to justice but merely for the chance at survival, since the penalty for failure is death. The very shoes of the slave women plotting a rebellion can account for why oppressed parties, like women, perform within a sustained context of violence and patriarchy.





In addition, James' characterization of the Night Women also highlights the moral ambiguity surrounding their motives. Although they are actively working to undermine the plantation hierarchy, they also subjugate other slaves, have a hierarchy of their own and work in secret, which separates them from other sympathetic parties. In a sense the revolt mirrors the mechanical workings of the plantation. bell hooks states "the oppressed are frequently required to act out and reproduce patterns of domination in their necessary struggle for survival"¹⁸ which is reflected in the work of James. Although the Night Women's actions can be considered survival focused and defensive, there are similarities here with the colonial masters also.

Lilith's position as a leader makes the dynamics of her group much more complex than those of a simpler heroic group with simple heroic resistance. Lilith's actions express the tension between an authoritative moral enforcement imposed to get others to act and the people who want to be treated morally as the result of their actions—demonstrating that moral accounting is anything but a necessary condition for colonial survival. The concept of "the everyday terror" of slavery (as articulated by Saidiya Hartman) as a form of normalized existence and suffering, which encumbered one's ability to make great decisions, also relates to the way Lilith acts¹⁹.

The Night Women collective step also draws attention to the intersection of gender and protest. They make decisions and plan according to their calculations, which are based on fact: the relative strength of a man in slavery, no matter how marginalized, is patriarchal logic. María Lugones asserts that colonialism invariably generates a gender matrix that arranges all relationships and rationalizes male supremacy, even among the oppressed²⁰. By asserting autonomy over their network, the Night Women refuse colonial domination and patriarchy inside the colonies; however, one cannot separate the former from mechanisms coercion of plantation work.

Yet, James makes the tale even more complex by presenting the pimples and rages of rebellion. For not only is rebellion tactical, it's also psychological, as loyalty and fear, anger and desire collide. It is the psychological dimension of the novel that enables us to understand how slaves engage both in acts of rebellion but also sustain repression by

reiterating hidden lives and spying, in order to echo, in a way that sustains the oppressive systems they seek to challenge. Intersectionality, as proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw provides a usefully framework for an analysis of such complexities of rebellion in slavery, since it shows that gendered oppression cannot be disentwined from race and social status within the slave community²¹.

James's representation of the Night Women's revolt ultimately challenges the idea of a heroic and morally good revolt. The Night Women's revolt was not- only a challenge to colonial power but also a betrayal. This implies that gender oppression and social hierarchy are intertwined with how rebellions occur. The Book of Night Women explores how challenging gender and/or the use of female rebellion presents a complex picture of resisting in an oppressive environment; one that is rooted in not dividing the analysis of violent acts against colonized peoples from the means to resist violent acts against colonized peoples.

VII.Linguistic and Narrative Strategies: Creole, Voice, and Subaltern Expression

James Marlon's The Book of Night Women provides many examples of using unique narrative and linguistic strategies in terms of theme and structure with respect to engaging power through gender and colonialism. The presence of Creole English, polyphony, and interiority in this text cannot only be viewed as stylistic innovations, but more importantly, may represent political acts toward empowering enslaved women by assuring their language develops in ways that can remain resistant to being codified and/or appropriated by colonial powers. Thus, we can think through language not only as a site of oppression but also as a source of empowerment. As Spivak points out, "representation is an instrument of power." By writing in Creole English and other non-Native dialects, James is not portraying the voices of enslaved women as being any less valid than they are as independent voices.

For many reasons, Lilith speaks Creole. To a certain degree, she utilizes Creole as a way of expressing her cultural identity and belonging. But, to a different level, it demonstrates the ways in which colonial constructs have produced liminal space. Following this line of thinking, Creole re-creates the plantation societies that these constructs were born out of;



thereby creating duality and forcing individuals such as the female speaker to have a dual sense of self. As mentioned earlier, James's use of language is an example of Bakhtin's heteroglossia; that is, it has multiple voices in a state of tension and conflict to create a polyphonic rather than monologic discourse. Therefore, when Creole language usage is in play, women's subjectivity is expressed, allowing for the comprehension of the stories of female speakers.

Furthermore, interior monologue and free indirect discourse enable James to investigate the psychological repercussions of gender violence. Lilith's thoughts—of terror, rage, revenge and seduction—are alternated to form a rich exploration of resistance under pressure. These methods enable the reader to feel oneself into Lilith's mind and heart without reducing her complicated attitude, and they describe a strategy of resurrecting a black woman as advanced by Saidiya Hartman in "critical fabulation," or doing historical research while also creating fiction about it as a way of accessing the "interiority" of subjugated subjects²². The novel thus undercuts the impulse to sentimentalize or objectify enslaved women in these genres, marked as they are by the equally messy world of intellectual and emotional and ethical personhood.

Narrative voice and form The performativity of gender on the plantation is also explored through James's use of narrative voice and form. In providing Lilith with narrative agency, the novel actively challenges patriarchal and imperialist discourses that deny women a voice. Yet even here, the narrative voice and form seem to index a subjectivity towards which any such agency points is incomplete and anomalous casualty of inability to speak otherwise than through being spoken for as Gayatri Spivak famously put it when she declared that "the subaltern cannot speak ... without being spoken for" (Spivak 308). The conflict between empowerment and restraint is reflected in language, which is both powerful and impotent.

The language of the novel—specifically its syntax and rhythm—reflects the experiences of women who were enslaved. The use of hard "c" tones, short bursts of text written as staccato sentences, and repeated phrases mimic the brutality of laboring, causing feelings of panic and self-pacing. This linguistic representation of physical feelings emphasizes that the formal elements of the text cannot be separated from thematic elements in

the text, such as those related to the lives of women who were enslaved. Therefore, linguistic play is a means of resisting through which James is able to highlight aspects of gender oppression that are not evident in public records, as well as to place the text within both the literary and the political contexts simultaneously.

In summation, the use of Creole, interiority, polyphony and embodiment in her writing creates a literary space so that women who are subalterns can articulate their experiences of oppression and resistance. These narrative strategies highlight the complex interrelationship among language, gender and colonial hegemony. Their intersection demonstrates that the literary form can be politically charged in the same manner as its content. By putting emphasis on both the voice and the style as part of the analysis, this research shows language is not separate from the enslaved woman's lived experience.

VIII. Memory, Trauma, and the Ethics of Narrative

Memory and trauma, consequently, serve as a way in which the theme of colonial oppression of women are pictured. Marlon James meticulously details the traumatic consequences of slavery, and in particular for women, on their sexuality, reproduction and body. The trauma the novel depicts exists not one by one, and not two. Instead, it is socially produced and transmitted from one generation of the enslaved to another, affecting their masters. This echoes Saidiya Hartman's claim that the psychic life of slavery cannot be nominally disassociated from its structural and somatic effects²³.

The novel represents Lilith's remembrance in bringing to light the role of memory as a mediating agent of identity, agency and resistance. Using fractured flashbacks, memory and inner monologue, the novel dramatizes the war between memory and survival, exposing the deep moral ambiguity of representing trauma. The protagonist's memory (Lilith) is presented through affect, body consciousness and unreliability, which illustrate the cognitive and affective aspects of trauma. As such, trauma is essentially a crisis of representation: it cuts violent experiences which have been lived through and dramatized again and again because they cannot be narrativized. Trauma, as Caruth also emphasizes, is "a story about survival," and a story of survival that always has some form



of compromise”²⁴. The non-linear, polyphonic and rhythmized style of the novel reflects the crisis of representation that springs from the nature of disjunctive memory and, especially from women’s consciousnesses fact of oppression.

Ethically, the text engages with the question of the limits of narrating suffering. Lilith’s narrative, while narrating suffering, steers clear of sensationalism and emphasizes the moral imperative of witnessing suffering. The conspiracy of the Night Women is as much about their memory of suffering as it is about their strategies of survival. In this, we can see another level of meaning in the text, as Angela Davis writes that, for enslaved women, their work, their sex, and their emotions were all commodified, and their memory of suffering is as much part of their strategies of survival as it is of their conspiracy. In fact, as Davis writes, "Survival strategies are inseparable from structures of harm, and the ethics of resistance are inseparable from the trauma that informs them" ²⁵. Yet another level of meaning that can be derived from the text is that memory, in the text, is also used as a means of continuity and counter-hegemonic pedagogy. For instance, memory, as shared by elders among the Night Women, provides them with the knowledge of the plantation’s gender hierarchy, strategies of white overseers, and strategies of survival. This memory also provides them with an embodied wisdom that enables them to rebel but also makes them aware of violence, caution, and compromise. Gayatri Spivak, in her essay on the subaltern, writes that "the subaltern has no history and cannot be represented except as an exception"; Lilith’s narrative, while being part of that history, also shows that memory is used as the medium of expression of that history, as a means of speaking, as "memory is used as the medium of expression of that history, as a means of speaking, as speaking itself" ²⁶.

The ethics of representing trauma involve not only depicting the traumatic story but also thinking of the audience as an audience. James’ work does not glorify rebellion; he uses the stories of his characters to make his readers aware of how colonialism has created a complex system of oppression based on gender. Trauma is not only a psychological state; it also serves as a vehicle for pedagogical learning. Readers must think about how gender, race and power are interrelated in both their lives and the lives of others. Thus, memory becomes a tool for creating historical



justice (saving what may otherwise be lost) and shedding light on the difficulty of calculating resistance.

As such, the relationship between memory and trauma in the novel serves to reinforce the idea that gender oppression existed on a systemic, intergenerational, and psycho-emotional level in colonial times; therefore, through using the personal experiences of women in captivity, James provides an example of how to create historically informed, theoretically complex, and formally inventive forms of historical consciousness. Furthermore, the ethical model presented in *The Book of Night Women* is also a way to negotiate between witness, memory, and style and create a basis for exhibiting gender oppression.

IX. Conclusion: Gender, Colonial Power, and Literary Witness

One way to read *The Book of Night Women* is as an absurdly rich exploration of how gender discrimination and colonial power overlap and intersect in ways that produce systems of oppression, trauma, for everyone involved. Sexual exploitation, slavery of all kinds and patriarchal power systems, are not discrete forms of oppression and exploitation but everything works together on the plantation – to inform who the enslaved women are and how they could resist. Wielding *Lilith and the Night Women* as a means to demonstrate this, James writes that gender oppression under colonialism is both not solely an issue of passing down generations of women and cannot be divorced from issues of political and economic power.

The above-discussed sections demonstrate that the plantation is a real and symbolic metaphor of gender inequality as an institution. The woman's body becomes the site of work, production, but also control: this tells us that colonial power is intimately linked to the exploitation of female susceptibility. Sexual violence, rather than being exceptional, is depicted as a central means of oppression shaping social hierarchies among the enslaved and the enslaver. The internalized patriarchy of the enslaved male makes this power dynamic even more complicated, raising moral conflict when oppression is lateral as it is vertical. Model, on the other hand, resists such simple binaries of violence and freedom and argues that even resistance cannot be seen in terms of any pure positivity but rather



it gets shaped under the sign of survival, moral compromise and knowing violence²⁷.

All these problems are brought to the fore through James's linguistic and narrative techniques based on giving causes a voice of their own in order to undermine the system's repressive capacities. Creole-inflected English, polyphony, interior monologues and bodily syntax all gesture to the materiality of trauma and women's agency in extreme precarity. Memory, trauma, and the ethics of storytelling come together to fashion a species of literary witnessing that is resistant to simplification. The revolt of the Night Women, the interiority of Lilith and ethical conundrums over actions "directs us to an intersection between cognition, relationship, and strategy"²⁸.

Indeed, the novelty of the novel is its refusal to romanticize or flatten out rebellion. James's book depicts the Night Women as a network constituted by secrecy, calculation and ethics, gesturing toward violence as circular in systems of injury. It thereby helps to expand the realm of literary responses to slavery, revolt and women by consolidating historical consciousness, psychological realism and linguistic experimentation as elements of a unified aesthetic and ideological praxis. In a broader sense *The Book of Night Women* informs the discussions of intersectionality AND coloniality of gender, that reveals how to understand hierarchies one must study the conjunctions between race, gender, labor and sexuality and the histories it yields in each above. It is also a provocation to scholars to read literature more critically and to understand that form, language, and voice are not separate from the ethical, political, and psychological issues raised by literary texts. *The Book of Night Women* is a product not just of historical imagination, but also archival investigation and close reading, thereby presenting an ethically sensitive methodology for examining the ways in which gendered colonial violence plays out in literature.

Finally, Marlon James's book shows how gender discrimination is an instrument and a product of colonial power relations, as well as the capacity of literature to empower subaltern women with a voice which is ethically informed, mentally sophisticated and politically engaged. Resistance is necessarily always complicit in such contexts, but as *The Book of Night Women* demonstrates, involving voice, memory, and form



makes it possible to engage the experience of oppression critically and by doing so makes room for critical knowledge as well as ethical response.

footnotes

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- ¹ Spivak 287
 - ² hooks 15
 - ³ Crenshaw 1244
 - ⁴ Spivak 308
 - ⁵ hooks 15
 - ⁶ Crenshaw 1244
 - ⁷ Foucault 194
 - ⁸ Lugones 742
 - ⁹ Beckles 61
 - ¹⁰ Hartman 4
 - ¹¹ Fanon 38
 - ¹² Hartman 82
 - ¹³ Hartman 82
 - ¹⁴ hooks 42
 - ¹⁵ James 25
 - ¹⁶ Crenshaw 1245
 - ¹⁷ Lugones 746
 - ¹⁸ hooks 102
 - ¹⁹ Hartman 56
 - ²⁰ Lugones 748
 - ²¹ Crenshaw 1248
 - ²² Hartman 7
 - ²³ Hartman 12
 - ²⁴ Caruth 4
 - ²⁵ Davis 12
 - ²⁶ Spivak 314
 - ²⁷ Fanon 59; hooks 102
 - ²⁸ Hartman 12; Caruth 4; Spivak 314

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